

Global Trading Guide for Community-Based Organizations



1998-05-08

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[Photo: Exporting merchandise from a Latin American port.]

Necessity — and opportunity — are driving more and more small community-based organizations into the global trade arena.

In Canada, some community-based organizations are looking to alternative trading ventures for new sources of revenue, as cuts in funding from traditional sources cause them to rethink their own budgets. Often, their motive is to ensure fair and equitable trade and labour practices, as well as sustainable resource use.

Until recently, it was hard to know where to begin. Trading information was scattered, yet voluminous enough to fill multiple filing cabinets. Such information was also so specialized that its collection required resources far beyond those of most community-based organizations.

Handy guide

To address this problem, [West End Community Ventures](#), located near Ottawa, has done the hard work, gathering and then boiling down the contents of those filing cabinets into a handy guide for neophyte community traders: *Practitioner's Resource Guide for Global Trading by Community-based Organizations*. The International Development Research Centre financed consultations for this book while Human Resources Development Canada underwrote the publishing costs.

The Guide arose from a conviction that, with a few exceptions, Canadian community-based organizations were lagging in the development of alternative trade and fair trade arrangements. "We felt it was timely to let people know these kinds of things are occurring elsewhere and that they can occur here as well," says [Art Montague](#), West End's director.

Linkage opportunities

"There was a general recognition that there were probably trade potentials," adds Montague. "What we wanted to do was bring in some people with experience in international development and take a look at whether or not there might be some linkage opportunities."

The English-language edition is almost equally useful to organizations in Canada and the South that seek to move goods to or from Canada, Montague says. (A French-language edition, produced by the [Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario](#), has a slightly different focus and contains slightly different information.) Both editions tell first-time traders how to get started, what issues they need to consider, and how to find more information. They suggest ways of monitoring fair trade issues, and warn against lurking pitfalls caused by such things as cultural differences and currency fluctuations. They also recommend having a go-between in the trading partner's country to handle details that call for in-depth local knowledge.

High pilferage

For example, depending upon where goods are sent, "without an agent to retrieve them, there is no guarantee that they will reach their intended recipient," warns Montague. "In a lot of countries, in a lot of harbours, pilferage levels are high."

While the intended audience is community-based organizations, the Guide is also a useful starting point for small private enterprises that are just breaking into global markets. "No matter [who you are], there are practices to which you have to adhere if you're going to be successful," he explains.

Attracting attention

So far, West End has received about 450 orders for the Guide, mainly from Canadian and American community-based organizations. While there is no way of tracing the Guide's distribution outside Canada, it seems to be attracting more attention than its sales figures alone would suggest. In the Philippines, a development assistance program circulated some 200 synopses among local co-operatives. Their interest has prompted West End to consider distributing the Guide in India and Thailand. In addition, the Guide is being reorganized and updated for distribution over West End's new web site.

Montague says the Guide's potential audience will continue to expand, as many non-governmental organizations involved in international development look for new ways to finance their efforts. Notable Canadian examples include Oxfam's [Bridgehead](#) and the [Mennonite Economic Development Associates](#) (MEDA). And outside Canada there is [PEOPLink](#), whose web site offers marketing expertise to community-based organizations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

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Links to explore ...

[Emerging Southern Markets Fueling Global Economic Growth](#), by Curt Labond

[Levelling the Playing Field for International Trade](#), by Henry Heald

[Yucape Project: Economic Development in Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula](#), by Chris Hayes

[Trade, Employment and Competitiveness \(TEC\) Home Page](#)